WHIRRAKEE

March 2011

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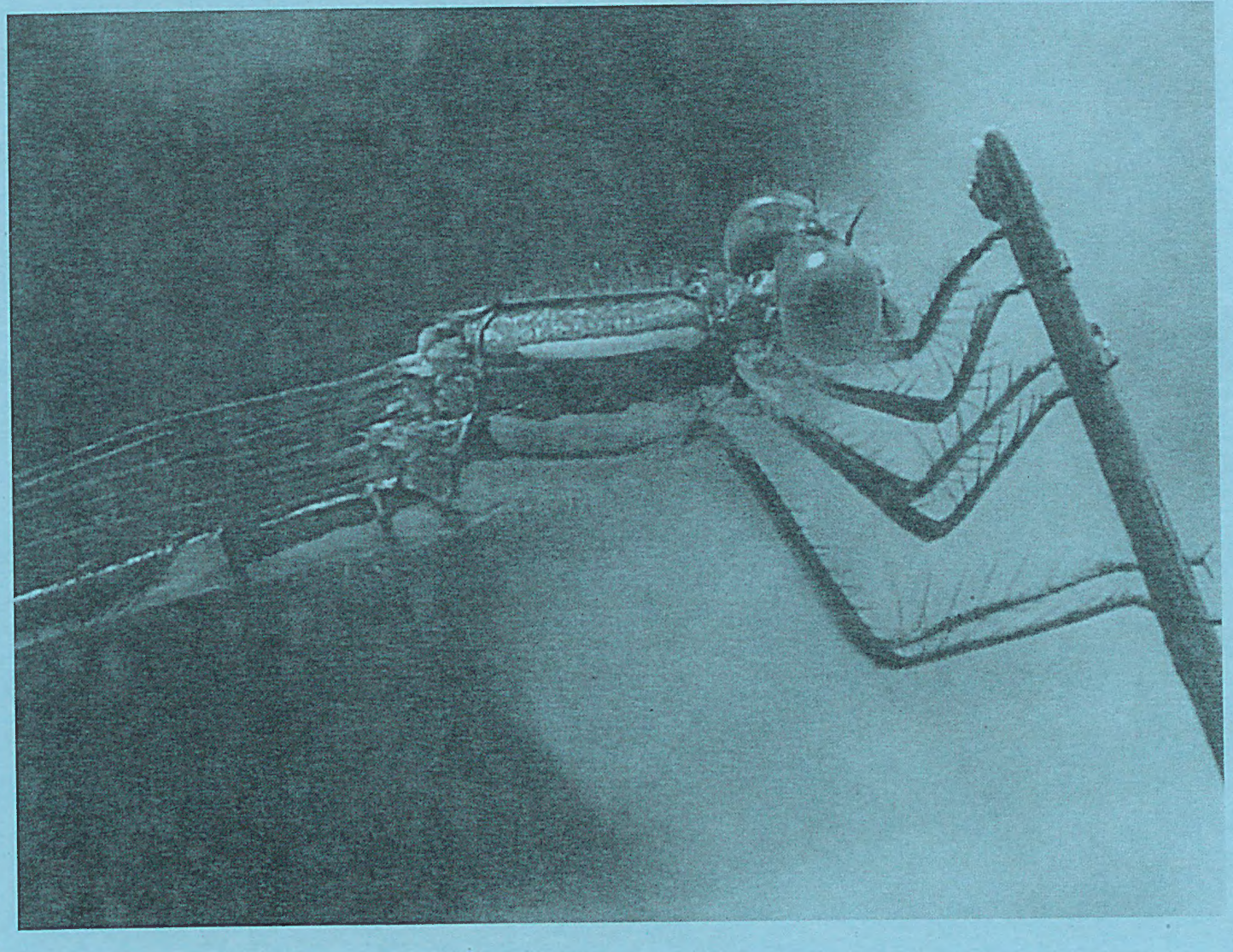

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO

FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
ISSN 0812-423X

Office Bearers for 2010 - 2011

President	Jan Orr	5443 5668
Senior Vice President	Matthew Comer	0409 162627
Junior Vice President	*position vacant*	
Secretary	Anne Bridley	5442 6188
Minute Secretary	Joy Clusker/Rod Orr	
Treasurer	Ben Goonan	
Membership Officer	Anne Bridley	5442 6188
Excursion organiser	*position vacant*	
Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan	
Librarian	Diana Collier (an assistant is still required)	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Matthew Comer	0409 162 627
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Rob Moors)	0407 427179
Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Stuart Fraser, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Bill Holsworth plus *two positions vacant*

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 32, No. 2, March 2011

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
What goes up must come down, so population crashes are predicted for all the current winners of the unusual weather conditions. However, before that happens, many will have had a chance to breed, and is so doing, will have renewed their survival stocks, in the form of seeds, corms and bulbs for plants, as well as dormant eggs and larval stages for some animals. And it goes on...the combination of wet summer with cold or mild winter produces different emergences again, favouring some groups over others, so the surprises are definitely not over yet.

Front page photo: Joy Clusker
It is hard to decide what to show on the front cover from the selection of Joy Clusker's wonderful close-up photos. All plants and animals are displaying such vivid colours at the moment, that we need to select those animals or plants that, besides bright colours, also have delicate form. It is hard to think of a more delicate form that that displayed by this damselfly. How do you tell a damselfly from a dragonfly? In the nymphal stage, damselflies have three feather-like gills extending backwards from the abdomen, and as adults they rest with their wings above their bodies. Dragonfly nymphs have internal gills and as adults rest with their wings outstretched. Comparing them side-by-side, damselflies have more delicate, slender bodies, in the larval and in the adult stages.

Short Notices

Change of speaker for March meeting

On March 9, instead of Saman Seneweera, we now have Damien Cook (Managing Director, Australian Ecosystems) speaking to us about "Wetlands in drought and flood".
And further continuing with the water theme is the…

March Club Excursion

Sunday, March 13. Meet at Golden Square Senior Citizens' Clubrooms at 8:30 am for Car Pooling and to leave at 8:45. Destination is Keith & Phyllis Graham's property, mid-way between Bridgewater and Newbridge & about 45 minutes from Bendigo. Keith has very kindly offered to show us some of the effects of the recent flooding of the Loddon River on parts of his farm, particularly on the river and its banks and some very old Red Gums.

For those who might want to spend only the morning away, this could be treated as a half-day excursion. For a full-day excursion, we are within easy travelling distance from the southern edge of the Kingower Forest and could spend the afternoon in the Orchid Dam area where there are interesting plants and bird-life, and then return to Bendigo by 5pm.

Bring lunch, morning and afternoon tea, camera, binoculars &, as usual, come prepared for all kinds of weather.

Spider on Hyancinth Orchid

In the last *Whirrakee*, Rod Orr had several spider photos, one of which was photographed on a hyacinth orchid (p.5). Initially Rod identified it as *Araneus eburnus*, when using Jenny Shield's BFNC spider book. The match was not perfect though, so Rod kept looking, and on an ID website for spiders of SE Queensland, he found a better match in *Araneus bradley*. Rod is pursuing the matter in his usual fashion, so we will hear his final identification when he gets to the bottom of it.

Rare and threatened plants in the Bendigo district

At the February club meeting, Anna Murphy talked about her work at DSE with a number of threatened local plant species. Anna encouraged members to come forward with known populations of these plants, and also new, unlisted plant species that might be getting rare and will need special attention in the future. She also encouraged us to volunteer in future searches for these plants.
Please contact Anna if you can help.
ph 5430 4730, mob 0427 842 510
email: anna.h.murphy@dse.vic.gov.au
Anna H Murphy
Threatened Species and Community Biodiversity Group, DSE
Box 3100 Bendigo Delivery Centre 3554

Mosaic burning project in Heathcote – Graytown NP ad Rushworth Forest

A community information evening is being planned for Tuesday 8 March, at 7 pm at Heathcote at the RSL Hall to present information about the planned mosaic burn project in the Heathcote – Graytown NP and Rushworth Forest.
Andrew Bennett and colleagues from Deakin and La Trobe (Bundoora) University have developed a study design, selected study areas and carried out pre-burning surveys of various taxa in spring 2010 and through the summer of 2010-2011.
The information evening is being held before any burning commences, in order to:
a) explain the objectives of the project, the study design and the various components (ie what is being studied)
b) provide a summary of the pre-burn data (general overview at least)
c) provide an opportunity for discussion and comments from people (e.g. discussion of the potential positive and negative effects, what the most important issues are etc).

Further particulars can be obtained from Andrew Bennett [andrew.bennett@deakin.edu.au] or Bill Holsworth [wholsworth@bigpond.com, or 5443 4063].

Some more attractive invertebrates… Photographer: Joy Clusker

Wanderer's butterfly older larva

green pupa

adult butterfly

Did you know…? The Wanderer or Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus)* is well-known in North America for its massive and wide-ranging migrations. In Australia, the species also makes limited migratory movements in cooler areas. It has only been present in Australia since about 1871. Today, they live in urban areas, where their food plants (e.g. milkweeds) are found.
Reference: http://australianmuseum.net.au/Wanderer-Butterfly

Peter Ellis is a grandfather again

This is one of the baby rosellas in my nesting box in Flora Hill, having a peek at the outside world. Taken in mid-January, when they had left the nest, but were still around. Their call is distinctive compared to their parents and any 'blow in' rosellas.

←

Orchard (swallowtail) **butterfly** or large Citrus butterfly ***Papilio aegeus***

First and second instar larvae look so much like bird droppings, I would class them as 'interesting' rather than 'attractive'! (Photographer: Joy CLusker)

What is this? →

All suggestions as to the nature of this animal will be published and will attract a prize (if they are reasonable).

(Photographer: Joy Clusker)

Sundrenched bush in high summer: This year we did not have much of a summer – nevertheless, Peter Ellis managed to capture that feeling of heat and light in these photos of late-flowering plants

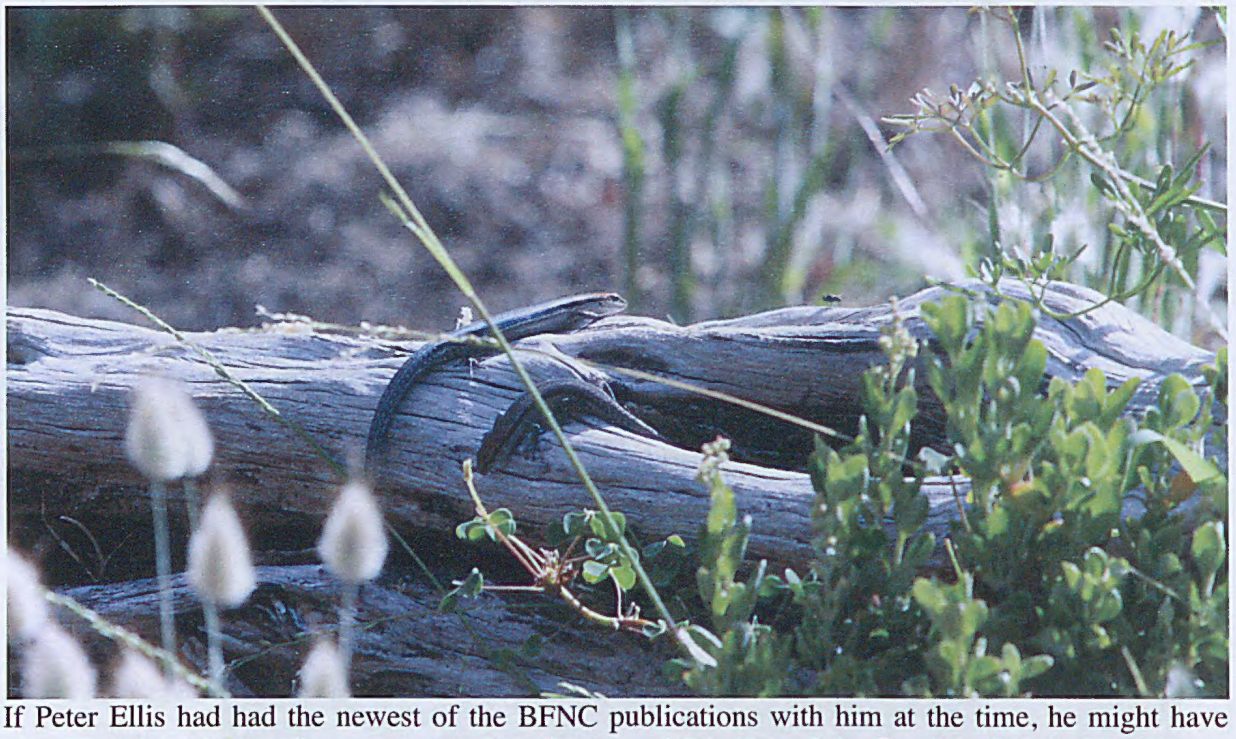
Totem Poles, *Melaleuca decussata*, mid-November at Crusoe Reservoir

Fingerflowers, *Cheiranthera alternifolia*, at the same location

Xerochrysum viscosum below in a beautiful dark colour form.

A few more summer images... Photographer: Peter Ellis

Superb Fairy Wren, *Malurus cyaneus*, 'caught' in the middle of December



If Peter Ellis had had the newest of the BFNC publications with him at the time, he might have identified this skink. However, now that 'Frogs and Reptiles of the Bendigo District' by Darren Green and Dale Gibbons is available, no reptile shall remain nameless.

February General Meeting, Speaker Paul Haw: 'Flooding – a natural occurrence'

By Sabine Wilkens

In the first meeting of the year, we were treated to a gripping talk by farmer and field naturalist *extraordinaire*, Paul Haw. Paul gave us a first hand and very insightful account of the recent flooding on the Loddon Plains, and the changes to the landscape that have occurred over time, which might exacerbate the effects of such natural occurrences. The effect of flooding on native flora and fauna is not well documented, but Paul knows it very well. One question that is often asked is, why does the water take so long to move along and why does it stay around for so long in this landscape?

At the start of the Loddon, water moves at a rate of approximately 2-3 km per hour, but further down the river, on the main flood plain, where the average slope might be 10 cm per km, it moves much more slowly, perhaps 2-3 km per day. This is one of the reasons why there is such a delay in water getting to downstream areas. In addition, many parcels of land have nobody to watch over them as landlords are absent and/or new to this area and have no idea how to deal with a flood situation. Paul said that ¾ of the land in his local (Boort) area has changed hands since the last flood. Insignificant levee banks build for various reasons, can hold water in ponds for many months. The evaporation rate in this area is only about 1m per year, so ponds of several meter depths will just not go away for many months to come.

Floods are normally good exporters of salt in country where the water table is close to the surface and salinity can become a management issue. However, salinity worries have been put on the back burner through the long drought which caused a lowering of the water table. This flood now is a reminder that salinity is still lurking down there. With extensive ponding remaining now, water cannot get away and salt is trapped on the land.

The flood has been devastating for native grasses and herbs, but it has other species a real break. Mosquitoes and spiders are everywhere and dragonflies are in larger numbers than ever. Ecologists could spend the next few decades following all the increases and crashes in populations of certain animals, and measuring the consequences on other populations that these animals feed on. It not just certain invertebrates that have occurred in larger numbers, several species of frogs have also appeared, and a myriad of legless lizard can be seen in some paddocks. Ducks and many other waterbirds have more habitat and more food at the moment, in some places they feed on the rotten grain below them. Fish numbers have also increased vastly, some natives and some non-natives. This is not all good news, as the big increases in juvenile carp may have a negative impact for many years to come. However, the water coming off the flooded paddocks is often totally black due to the rotting organic matter and this process takes out oxygen, causing fish in some areas to die in large numbers too. Paul said that along a stretch of the Murray, he saw many dead Murray Cod where black water had flowed in.

Although this recent flood seemed extreme, it is not the worst by a long shot, said Paul. In 1870, it rained for two weeks straight causing a huge flood. The most recent flood event before this one was in 1996.

It is hard to relate the sense of deep understanding of the land shown by Paul Haw. How to live with a natural phenomenon like flooding, rather than fight it, how to view the locusts and their predator and parasites as part of the whole ecosystem rather than something separate that must be eliminated, how to read the landscape over time and place ad find our place in it, enthralled the listeners that night.

Paul (along with co-author Margaret Munro) has just published a book with the title 'Footprints across the Loddon Plains'. It can be purchased through the Boort Development Committee. Email boortdev@hotmail.com $49.95 + $13 post & packing. Look out for it.

Catching Hoverflies

Editor's note: The following is a chapter from a book that I have read recently. It was originally published in Swedish and I read a German translation. Unfortunately, there is no English version, so I have done a fairly crude job of translating this chapter, which I particularly enjoyed. This will be published here over the next couple of issues.
The book is written by a man who lives on an island off Stockholm and collects hoverflies. I hope you can follow it without the preceding 14 chapters!

The details of the book are as follows:
Sjöberg, Fredrik (2004). *Die Fliegenfalle – über das Glück der Versenkung in seltsame Passionen, die Seele des Sammlers, Fliegen und das Leben mit der Natur.* Frankfurt: Eichborn Verlag

(*The flytrap – about the happiness of immersion in strange passions, the soul of the collector, flies and a life with nature*)

Chapter 15 –
The readable landscape

It is said, that without an unusual sense of time perception, you cannot become a really good geologist. It is more or less about intuition, and not about knowledge *per se*. Empirical knowledge is another thing altogether, it can always be gained through hard work, characterised by patient striving. But there is such a thing as an innate sense of time, a talent, which somewhat like musicality, can seldom be gained by hard work alone, and this is apparently the secret of the best geologists. I am unsure if this is true, but it makes sense.
Indeed, what really are ten thousand years? Or three million? In relation to a billion? Us others have no idea – we can understand the numbers like lines on a scale, and occasionally we understand more or less the kinds of comparisons, in which the history of earth is represented by one hour, and the history of humans on its surface is only counted in seconds. However, the true sense of time is not there.

My own perception of periods of time that are so long that they are bordering on infinity, always depends on such aids, crude artificial rulers that serve as substitutes for the deep insight, which I do not possess. It is even hard to get a grip on the time period that stretches beyond the lifespan of people living today, except with numbers and anecdotes. It is likely that the same talent makes for a really good evolutionary biologist or historian. I do sometimes wish I was one of them, not for lack of trying, but I have always failed due to this lack of sense of time. Only a few hundred years, and my own incapacity overwhelms me.

This is why I am busy with my insect net in the here and now, and I am reading my landscape in the present tense. Believe me, even this story is multi-layered enough and full of surprises, no matter how short-sighted we are.

The whole thing with the hoverflies is, in the end, also a matter of understanding – we may call it linguistics. I sense that I wasn't completely honest, when describing my motives earlier. I did not answer the question well. Why flies? I was so full of my desire not to pretend some utilitarian motif, I simply explained my tendency to catch flies as a cheap anaesthesia and straight forward hobby hunt, as a trickle for my vanity, and the eternal longing of the poor individual to become the best. And that may well be the truth, but there is something else, something that if not bigger, is probably much more beautiful. Nobler. It shouldn't be like that; even the road of the ambitious to fulfilment, wherever it is, should be worth all the honour, even if it is only because being in a world of highest personal achievement outside of the usual competition, is a good place to live.
Whatever the case, to learn a language is never wrong.

For this reason, let's think for a moment about the readability of the landscape, whether or not we can understand the landscape in a similar way to literature, or whether it can be experienced in a similar

way to art or music. It is all a matter of knowing the language. One could object immediately by saying that we all, independent of education and surroundings, can grasp the beauty of diverse pieces of art and music. That is correct, but it is equally correct that untrained senses are easily taken in by sweet magic and romance, with which there is nothing wrong intrinsically, but which really is only a first encounter, which seldom leads particularly far. In the Arts, there is also a language, which can be learnt, and equally, music also has its hidden nuances.

In literature, the conditions are clearer. If you cannot read, you cannot read. And, if I insist, that the landscape is able to offer us a kind of literary experience of varying depth, I mean it. First of all you have to learn the language. I thus think of the flies as words in the vocabulary of animals and plants, with which, within the constraints of grammatical laws of evolution and ecology, all kinds of stories can be told.

To recognise a *Chrysotoxum vernale*, when seeing one, and to know why it happens to fly just now and in this very area, is satisfying in a way that is not exactly easy to understand. I fear we need to go the long way, via the important, before we can get to the beautiful in this matter. It is up to you to judge what is the more vital.

Chrysotoxum vernale is very elegant, and, as is the way of hoverflies, it resembles a wasp. If you spot the difference, you can already read, however it becomes really exciting, when you can distinguish it from a *Chrysotoxum arcuatum*. That is quite a difficult thing to do. During year-long training, you have to capture the twin species and study them pinned in position, because for the identification, one of the important factors is the colour of the innermost quarter of the front thighs.

For that reason, I have caught a number of specimens over the years. I have indeed busied myself so intensely with the twin *Chrysotoxum*, that I am now confident enough to distinguish them in the field, without even having to catch them with my net. Therefore I know that *arcuatum* occurs quite commonly, whereas *vernale* is a rarity. But why is this so? The question is open like a half-read novel.

In my collection are six *vernale* from our island, caught over the years between May 27 and June 19, it seems this species does not fly over any longer period. That is interesting in itself. Even more interesting is that the species, beyond the six flies in my collection, in central Sweden, is currently only known from a single specimen. To be exact, from another island, a few sea miles south of here. There are a few on Öland and Gotland, also in Schonen, but otherwise it has disappeared from the mainland. In the 19th century, it was caught in Blekinge and Småland, in Östergotland and Västergotland, but not after that. Why?

Our knowledge is rarely sufficient, it is enough, however, to formulate a reasonably solid hypothesis. Nothing is as practical as a hypothesis. Especially since the collector is forced every now and then to talk to uncultured individuals, who seem to be convinced that somebody who harms a fly is immoral and brutal. They are of the ecological kind, if the expression is permitted. Gentle people, who sit at home at their smelly compost piles with a pious certainty that the race has been run for many creatures on this earth. They are badly tortured by nightmares of extinction, you can tell by their sad eyes.

To be continued…

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday, March 9 7.30pm
We are continuing with the water theme... Damien Cook (Managing Director, Australian Ecosystems) is going to talk about "Wetlands in drought and flood"

Wednesday, April 13 7.30pm
Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Workshop
'Identifying local native grasses'.
Don't forget to bring along your specimens!
(there was a flyer about this in the December *Whirrakee*)

Wednesday, May 11 7.30pm
Associate Professor Alan York from the University of Melbourne will try and answer the question "What can ants tell us about fire management outcomes?"

Fauna Group
This group normally meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm. New and seasoned Club members are most welcome to attend.

SEANA Autumn Camp 2011 Anglesea
Friday 25 - Monday 28 March 2011
Hosted by ANGAIR Inc.
Based at the Anglesea YMCA Recreation Camp
Excursions: - coastal heathlands & woodlands, rock pools, orchids, birds.
Registration & Payment due by 25 February.
Contact: ANGAIR Inc. PO Box 12 Anglesea 3230, ph 5263 1085
email: admin@angair.org.au

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Planned Bendigo Family Nature Club
The Bendigo Sustainability Group, BDEC and BFNC will combine their approach to this. Initial ideas/plans include Leaf Litter Jungle, Mud dwellers, Plants - alive or dead?
All activities will be held on 3rd Sunday of the month.
Contact Jan Orr for more details.

Loddon Shire Nature Tourism Brochure

A handy brochure with a map of the Loddon Shire on one side showing the location of various parks & reserves & notes on the other side is now available from the Loddon Visitor Information Centre. Ph 5494 3489, email loddonvisitorinformation@loddon.vic.gov.au

Mosaic burning project in Heathcote – Graytown NP ad Rushworth Forest
A community information evening is being planned for Tuesday 8 March at 7 pm at Heathcote at the RSL Hall to present information about the planned mosaic burn project in the Heathcote – Graytown NP and Rushworth Forest.

See page 3 for details

Further particulars can be obtained from Andrew Bennett [andrew.bennett@deakin.edu.au] or Bill Holsworth [wholsworth@bigpond.com, or 5443 4063].